



**Testimony on House Bill 5862 presented to the Michigan House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
December 6, 2016**

Chairwoman LaFontaine and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to address the House Committee on Natural Resources. My name is Dennis O'Brien and I am President of the Great Lakes Council of the International Federation of Fly Fishers. The Great Lakes Council represents the interests of fly fishing anglers in Michigan, Indiana and Northwest Ohio. We are here today to strongly oppose HB 5862 which would eliminate the requirement that a permit be obtained to engage in recreational gold mining in Michigan streams and rivers.

This bill is bad for Michigan from both economic and conservation perspectives. It holds the potential to economically damage Michigan's thriving angling economy and also would place ecologically fragile streams across our state at risk. Michigan is home to over 20,000 miles of cold water trout streams and many more miles of warm water streams. Our state is recognized internationally for its trout, salmon and steelhead fisheries and anglers from around the world come here to fish and spend their recreational dollars. If enacted, HB 5862 will endanger this legacy.

Destruction of Habitat and Damage to Fisheries

First, let's point out the impact unrestricted recreational gold mining could have on the delicate ecology of our rivers and streams. Recreational mining often uses suction dredges and these dredges are specifically cited in the proposed statute. These devices work like underwater vacuum cleaners, sucking up gravel and sand from the stream bottom.

It has been documented that recreational mining kills the aquatic insects and invertebrates that fish depend on for food; destroys fish eggs and disrupts reproduction, destabilizes gravel used for spawning, destroys woody debris and disturbs sediment and clouds pristine streams. Miners often focus on stream riffles and gravel bars, the areas of our streams that are critically important to fish populations.

Recognizing the havoc that these practices have on delicate fisheries, other states including California, Tennessee, Idaho and Maine, among others, have restricted and regulated these practices to protect their fisheries. The U.S. Forest service also restricts these practices on forest service lands. If this bill becomes law in Michigan, we would be headed in the opposite direction.

Negative Economic Impact

In addition to the ecological impact, we ask that you consider the negative economic impact unrestricted mining could have. Anglers have a big impact on Michigan's economy. According to the DNR, anglers spend in excess of \$2 billion a year in trip related expenses and equipment. Moreover, our state's 1.1 million licensed anglers generate \$18 million in revenues in license fees and attract \$11 million in federal funds for fish and habitat conservation.

Should Michigan lose its reputation as a prime angling destination these economic benefits will be placed at risk. Certainly, any economic benefits that might be gained by offering unrestricted mining are overshadowed by the potential to lose big dollars if Michigan's reputation as a fishing destination is damaged.

In summary, unrestricted and unregulated recreational gold mining holds grave ecological and economic implications for Michigan. The risks that HB 5862 presents far outweigh any benefits and we ask that you vote against this bill. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Dennis O'Brien
President
Great Lakes Council
International Federation of Fly Fishers